The Black Cat

APRIL 1908

El Cuchillo
Frederick Ferdinand Moore

The Rousing of Ann
Anna A. Greenleaf

The Luck of the Chaperon
Annie Grey Butchert

A Social Somersault
George Randolph Chester

Mugsie, the Unwashed
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The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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El Cuchillo.*

BY FREDERICK FERDINAND MOORE.

IT was all played out to the very end by both of them with the deliberate coolness and enjoyment of a pair of chess players. It was an awful game, but I think that both enjoyed the playing and were satisfied when it was ended.

The stake was a man's life, the game lasted some three months, and I doubt if any man ever got as much satisfaction out of gambling, just for the sake of gambling, as did Trumpeter Hardy of the Second United States Cavalry.

We had been in Camp Wallace eight months and I could see the men were beginning to lose interest in life. The novelty of living in the Philippines had worn off and the killing monotony of an isolated army post was creeping over every man in the command.

I noticed Hardy first. He had always been so joyously reckless and contented with any state of affairs that his moody spells and melancholy air became apparent at once.

I will never forget that day when we lay under the palm trees down by the ice-plant and gazed out across the China Sea. He was stretched full length in the sand with his elbows buried in the

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yielding dust, his chin resting between his palms, and a cigarette drooping between his lips.

I talked about various things — the old station back in the States, the exhibition drill at Madison Square Garden, and the countless little incidents that will come back to a man when he is stricken with nostalgia in the Philippines. I rattled along for half an hour when I suddenly discovered that he was making no replies to my observations, but was staring into the sand with unseeing eyes.

"What's on your mind, Trump?" I asked him.

"Oh, leave me alone," he growled.

"There's something wrong with you," I continued in as serious a tone as I could muster. "There has been something wrong with you for a week or two. Is it the girl back in Kentucky or are you getting tired of the outfit?"

"I am sick of myself," he shot back, with more ill-feeling than I had ever seen him display. "This thing is getting on my nerves; I don't want to play monte, there seems to be no more fun in getting drunk, the thoughts of pay-day make me tired, and if Kelly was to have roast turkey for supper I'd think twice before I'd look at it. Since I was a kid I've lived on excitement, and I have banged clean around the world looking for it. I enlisted in the army to get it, and now that game has played out, and all I get is jamming atmosphere through a horn and marking off the hours of the day like a damned town-clock, for a lot of fool soldiers dressed in gunny-sack clothes.

"I get them up to eat, I send them to work like a gang of farm hands, I drive them to supper, drag 'em out for roll call, send 'em to bed and blow 'em to sleep. It's the same old thing every day — the same old grub, the same old ice plant puffing away all day and all night, with every puff just so far apart and always the same.

"The palm trees all look alike, these niggers are all alike, it's the same old gang playing monte — the days and nights, moon, sun and stars, weather and all, are just the same day by day. I wish they would put me in the guard house, spread-eagle me, crucify me to the chapel door or drive me out into the jungle with the monkeys. Anything for a change! Kelton, if I can't get some-

thing to interest me and make me forget myself I'll go stark, staring mad, and that is as honest as I am lying here with you."

I laughed at him and called him a fool, but I knew he was telling the truth. I had seen too many cases like his ripen into tropical insanity and I knew that I must divert his mind, even if I had to steal his clothes or burn the barracks. In creating a condition that would make him forget himself I knew that he must not suspect the artificial excitement. If he ever caught a glimpse of what was behind the curtain it would mean a padded cell for him, because, no matter what really happened after that, he would believe it was manufactured for his special benefit, even if a volcano developed in the parade ground or the natives massacred half the garrison. One false touch would destroy his mind — if the curtain came up too soon, or was delayed in dropping, the whole structure would be ruined and a farce would become a tragedy.

I could not foresee at that time the possibility of his taking the stage management out of my hands, because I did not realize his desperation to find something to amuse himself. I had figured on a mild sort of vaudeville — a cheap distraction for the time being and then inventing something new, after the idea of a continuous performance. When it was all over I could understand how inadequate my ideas of stage management were and how I had blundered in supposing that a Punch and Judy show would meet all requirements. He needed a drama in real life with none of the gaudy fittings of the stage, and instead of seeing it played out before him he wanted to play it himself.

I racked my brains for a plot and waited a day or two so that he would think I had forgotten. I was really handicapped in producing anything of startling proportions, because I stood to get in trouble with the War Department, and a man who attempts to produce Wild West shows in an army post and tries to palm them off as realism pure and simple finds the government a censor and a keeper of military prisons.

Close by the camp there was a small native village of bamboo houses, and I knew that I must use it for my stage. The task I had set myself was no child's play, as a clump of palm trees, a hundred Filipinos, a herd of half wild pigs and innumerable naked children afford but limited means in scenery and properties

when those same things are gradually driving a man insane by their very presence.

The next Saturday Hardy was trumpeter of the guard. I strolled down the beach trying to devise a scheme that would make life worth living for him when he was off duty.

And all unknowing I found it and set the game in motion, but how was I to know that the story Manuel the fisherman told me had in it the possibilities it afterwards developed?

I found him repairing his nets under the shadow of his nipa hut. His banca was pulled up on the white coral beach and the China Sea was dozing in the sunlight before us. He smiled as he saw me approach and then resumed his placid chewing on the betel, waiting for me to speak.

I asked him about his fishing and he told me of his catches for the past week. Then he saw an old native on the trail to the barrio and he stopped short and murmured through his teeth "El Cuchillo." I recognized in the old man who was passing a surly Filipino who kept a saloon in the village.

"Why do you call him El Cuchillo?" I asked. "I see nothing about him to suggest such a name — why call him The Knife, hombre?"

"Ah, señor, it is a story that goes back to the time before the Americanos came to Luzon. He has had that name for twenty years, and it suits him well. If you knew his history as well as we of El Poro you also would call him The Knife. But of the deeds that he has done you must learn from others. I have a family and I have no fancy for being a sheath for his bolo and I need my back to draw nets. I think, señor, it looks like a storm."

I dropped a peso in the net. "Tell me about El Cuchillo," I commanded.

He spat betel-juice skilfully at an inoffensive lizard in the sand and wiped his mouth on the back of his wrinkled hand and I knew that the peso was not thrown away.

"Tell not to any one what I tell to you this day," he began, "or by the Blessed Virgin I may be the next. El Cuchillo, señor, as you well know, means The Knife. If you wish to die and die quickly and silently and have your friends find you with a knife buried in your back, say one word to that man which displeases

him. Only one word, and some time when you do not think of him any more, in the back you will get the knife. Always in the back, señor, as you walk through the barrio in the dark or you stoop to drink from a well or as you lie asleep in your house.

"In El Poro there have been ten. They all did something or said something that El Cuchillo did not like. Perhaps they owed him a peso and did not pay — they laughed at him, or their children threw cocoanuts in his yard or let his carabao out of the compound — if El Cuchillo does not like you, beware of the knife. *You* may forget it, but he will not, and he may give you a drink as you pass or smile at you from his door, but he is only waiting with his knife.

"It is always in the back. He never warns, he never lets you know he is displeased with you until you feel the steel in your back. He lets you live until he is ready, and then he tells you with the knife.

"We have found them in the rice paddies. I have found them on the beach, the morning sunlight finds them in the streets of the town, or the Padre is called in when they are found in bed. It is always the same — the knife is found in the center of the back, driven deep to the hilt and left there as a sign and a warning to others.

"That is all, but remember, señor, keep away from that man. He may not like the way you wear your hat — the way you drink from his bottles may not suit him — the way you hand him the money may anger him — and then the knife — and always in the back. And to no one tell this and for the love of God tell to no one that Manuel told it to you, for I must stay here and fish, while you, señor, have but a short time to stay. So that is why we call him El Cuchillo. I think that before the night we will have the strong storm."

I wish I had forgotten the story, but it kept running through my mind. I dreamed of El Cuchillo that night in a harmless sort of way, simply seeing him walking through the barrio in my sleep. I have often wondered since whether it was intended for a warning, as I look back over the events that followed.

I met Hardy as he came off guard. He had the same dull look in his eye and I followed him into barracks to try to get him to

come swimming. He refused to consider it until I suggested that perhaps it was wiser to keep out of the bay because there were sharks. He immediately threw off his belt and started for the beach and I trailed along behind, congratulating myself that I had aroused his interest.

We went into the water in a matter-of-fact way. Hardy settled down to a silent side stroke and skirted the shore. I tried to inject some noise and life into the recreation by splashing him.

"Stop your damn noise," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

"You'll drive the sharks away," he replied.

"I don't fancy any man-eaters snapping at my legs," I said.

He stopped swimming and brushed the water out of his eyes and stood shoulder-deep in the bay. I could see that he was angry.

"I am down here swimming," he said solemnly, "just because I wanted to see if there were any sharks, and you scare them away."

He walked to shore and put on his clothes, pouting like a spoiled child. I knew he would not lose his temper with me, for I had slept in the next bunk during our enlistment, and a man never had a brother who could compare with an army "bunkie."

While we were dressing I told him the story of El Cuchillo. It interested him and I elaborated upon the tale, seeing that he enjoyed it. I went into details and related some imaginary killings by the saloon-keeper. His eyes glowed and he was eager as a boy who hears for the first time some wondrous fairy story. When I ended the history of El Cuchillo with a rather dramatic climax he began to whistle an old college melody. I told myself that I could keep him interested if I could get a few more stories from Manuel as good as El Cuchillo. I thought then that his case was not so serious as I had at first supposed.

He had his old stride as we walked through the barrio and he was getting keen enjoyment out of his cigarette. I chattered away and he chimed in at times with some remark not always connected with my subject, but I was quite pleased to find him taking interest in anything.

Suddenly he stopped short in the street. "Come have a bottle

of beer," he said, pointing to the shack in a lane of palms. It was the saloon of El Cuchillo.

"Let us go to the Chinaman. Leave that old fool alone — that is the saloon of El Cuchillo — the story I just told you, don't you remember?"

"Oh, so it is," he drawled, "but Big Hardy never started anything he did not finish. Are you bluffed?"

"I am not interested in him," I said, assuming a careless air, "Come up to the Chink's and I'll throw you for a dozen bottles — poker dice, one flop."

"Well, I'm interested in him," he replied. "I would like to see a man who can kill for years and never swing for it. Come on, Kid, you won't miss mess call. Don't let a nigger give you cold feet," and he laughed in his old good-natured way and dragged me along into the palm grove and in through the door of the shack.

We sat down at one of the little tables and El Cuchillo shuffled out into the room. He smiled craftily as he saw us and I saw that he was a Chinese half-blood. His face was villainous enough to fit his character and his every movement was cautious yet sure, and his gait was slinking and stealthy. His bare arms glistened in the mellow light that shifted through the bamboo shade and I saw the powerful, supple muscles playing under the muddy-brown skin.

He brought the beer and Hardy and I drank in silence. He had a dreamy look in his eye and as he sipped the beer he threw frequent glances at El Cuchillo, who sat apart and smoked quietly. There was something about the native that suggested to me a huge snake basking in the sun and waiting for prey.

Hardy finally stood up and put his hand in his pocket to get the money. I thought he was bored by El Cuchillo after hearing me tell of his murderous deeds, and found him commonplace after all.

The native came forward to receive his pay. Hardy picked up his half-filled glass as if to drink and then stooped forward and peered into the face of the native, grinning insolently. He drew back his hand and dashed the beer into the face of El Cuchillo; then his massive shoulders plunged forward, and he seized the

puny saloon-keeper by the nose and spat between his eyes. He waited an instant until his victim realized what was happening and then he gripped the lower half of his face with crushing force, spat into his eyes again and laughed mockingly and thrust him away.

El Cuchillo tumbled over backwards on the ground. Hardy roared derisively and called him vile names in Spanish. Then he backed out the door, dragging me after him, and walked up to the post, laughing in glee over what he had done.

It was all over before I could interfere or grasp the full significance of what was taking place. Then I very foolishly thought that it was ended so far as Hardy was concerned and looked upon the incident as a good beginning for my scheme. Hardy at once became the life of the garrison and was bubbling over with fun and kept the whole squadron laughing at his antics.

He swore me to secrecy. I expected that El Cuchillo would report the insult to the Colonel, but a week passed without the dreaded summons to headquarters.

I tried to make Hardy see that he had done something small and mean, but he laughed at me and refused to consider it in that light. From the first time I met him I had always found him ready to whip a man who would kick a dog, so I could not account for his unwarranted attack upon El Cuchillo. Then a light dawned upon me when I remembered his swimming because there were sharks in the bay — he found enjoyment in the knowledge that El Cuchillo would seek his life.

I missed him one night and found him walking to and fro through the barrio, stopping at the ice plant at the end of each trip so that the light from the fire-box in the engine-room could fall upon him and make him visible the entire length of the village. He was in a jolly mood and came back to the post with me when I suggested that it was nearly time for tattoo.

"I am getting some good out of life now, Kelton," he said. "That nigger soothes my brain. When I get to wondering what I am living for I think that El Cuchillo is behind me with his knife and the slight thrill I experience is as good as a furlough home. It is a tonic, man, and I can realize how people become addicted to a drug. Your discovery of El Cuchillo has saved me

a week of sleepless nights. I can feel myself getting better every day — I hope I don't get tired of the game."

I tried to argue with him and bring him to understand that he had done something underhanded, but he would have none of that. "The man has blood on his hands," he said, "I feel as if I was playing with a snake and trying to make him strike at me."

"And if he strikes? You know he never attacks in the open. After he has shown his fangs it will be too late. I can't see what good you get out of knowing the man wants your life and in giving him countless chances. You are letting him play his own game and deal his own hands."

"All I am playing for is to *see* if he will get me. That is all a man ever gambled for — to find out whether he is to get your money or you are to get his. The value of the stakes is nothing — a thousand dollars is as uninteresting as a brass spur — but split it into four parts and give it to four poker players with a pack of cards, and you have something worth while. I don't want to kill that half-breed — if I did I would have to find something to amuse myself. I won't let him kill me if I can help it. If I catch him at it I'll kill him — if I don't it means that he is a better player than I am, and I lose."

"That's murder," I said.

He laughed. "If I don't get him or he fails to get me — well, it's a sure thing I'll get myself. Can't you let a drowning man have his straw?"

It is easy enough to look back and think of how I could have stopped him. It always is, after the damage is done. I considered taking the case to the captain or the surgeon or the colonel, but enlisted men rarely take their troubles to the officers. A boy has a small chance of breaking down army discipline. You have to know the inside of the service to understand my position.

The next day I met Hardy at stables. We were grooming and his horse was next to mine.

"Do you know the worst insult a white man could give to a native?" he whispered over the neck of his bay.

"No."

"Laugh at him. I asked the pack-master and he told me. They don't mind a blow in the face — they were trained to take that

from the Spaniards and let it pass unheeded. But when you laugh at them you have lost your chance to die in bed. They will go to church and pray for a strong arm and a sharp knife and ask the help of all the saints in a pretty job of carving.

"I got up this morning before first call. Went down to the barrio and found your El Cuchillo cooking his rice in the yard. I sat down a dozen feet from him and laughed — not out loud, you know, but just kept smiling and chuckling in a pitying way. He wasn't mad or anything like that — say, ever see a rattlesnake bite himself ——— ?"

"No talking on the picket line," said the lieutenant, and Hardy smiled in the mane of his horse and winked gleefully at me.

It dragged along like that for three long months. Hardy grew fat and his trumpeting was the marvel of the garrison ; he turned those tiresome army calls into the sweetest music. Sergeant Phelps said that Hardy's blowing sounded to him like the singing of a perfectly happy canary bird.

Every Saturday Hardy went to the saloon of El Cuchillo and drank a bottle of beer. He forbade me going with him, but he always told me how he paid for his drink, laughed in the face of the native and walked out. Every night he walked through the barrio alone before he went to bed, and I discovered that his pistol was missing from the gun-rack while he took his stroll.

I began to hope that El Cuchillo did not dare to attempt revenge on Hardy, but kept his wrath to himself and endured the insults rather than have trouble with the military authorities. I thought that I would tell my theory to Hardy, and when he discovered the uselessness of playing with El Cuchillo he would make some apology and drop his game.

I turned my argument over in my mind one evening, and after I had framed suitable answers to every objection he might bring up I went into the barrio to find him.

The ice-plant was panting wearily as I plunged into the dark street. At the bend in the road I could hear an old woman chanting her rosary. I looked down the goat trail to the saloon of El Cuchillo and the soft light of a cocoanut-oil lamp was streaming through the door, making the jungle path look like the entrance to a pagan shrine.

I looked inside the saloon. The first thought that struck me, when I saw the interior, was that some clever artist had posed two models. They might have stood at the table opposite each other drinking a toast with some quick poison which took effect instantly and produced the tableau before me.

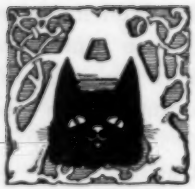
Hardy was sitting in the chair with his shoulders thrown across the table and his arms stretched straight out but hidden under the breast of El Cuchillo. The native had fallen on him from directly across the table and his face was hidden in the collar of Hardy's blouse. A great brown spot the size of a dinner plate was on Hardy's back and in the center of the spot the hilt of a knife, like a crucifix before which El Cuchillo was prostrated.

I took up the lamp. I saw that El Cuchillo was lying upon a pistol gripped in Hardy's hand. The only way I could account for their positions, was that Hardy had feigned sleep to tempt the native and had caught him with the upraised knife. Hardy must have fired as El Cuchillo was making the downward thrust, but had been too late by the fraction of a second to escape the falling knife.

The face of the trumpeter was turned toward me as if peering out from under the body of El Cuchillo. The face was smiling.

The Rousing of Ann.*

BY ANNA A. GREENLEAF.



AFTER the supper things had been cleared away and the kitchen restored to its characteristic primness and neatness, Ann and Abbie drew their chairs close to the little table and rested their worn, wrinkled hands, idle for the first time during the evening hour, upon the spotless linen cloth.

Both women were small and spare, but here the likeness ended. Ann's eyes were blue and faded, while Abbie's were black and sharp, and her determined, energetic manner contrasted strongly with her younger sister's hesitating, timid ways.

They looked long at each other, but neither spoke. Each well knew the thoughts the other strove to hide, and each saw the homesickness the other was trying bravely to overcome.

The stillness was unbroken, save by the ticking of the old wooden clock on the mantel, its pendulum swinging contentedly to and fro, wholly unconscious that it was soon to become the innocent cause of apprehension to its aged mistresses.

This was the last night they would spend in the old home for many months, for they had accepted their nephew's kind invitation to spend the winter with him in the village. His residence overlooked the valley where stood the little old black house which was the only home the maiden sisters ever knew.

No good fortune like this had ever before come into their uneventful lives, and they were grateful for the invitation, for the little cottage in the valley was old and leaky, and the winter winds blew through the cracks and crevices with relentless cruelty.

Many years since, their winter chores had become a hardship and they realized that, which they would not acknowledge even to each other, — that they were growing old and feeble.

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The house had never been left alone, and, as they looked lovingly around at each beloved object, each felt a pain tugging at the heart as they pictured the old house standing alone, silent and deserted throughout the long, dreary months stretching before them. Their tender consciences upbraided them, and they felt like guilty creatures about to turn traitor to a friend who had given them shelter.

At last Abbie spoke, her shrill voice breaking the silence between them so abruptly that Ann, whose mind was wandering far into the past, started, bewildered at the suddenness of the recall.

"Ann! what if they should object to the clock?"

"What, what is that you said, sister?" stammered Ann, vainly trying to collect her scattered senses.

Abbie repeated the question.

Ann's composure returned as the inconsequence of the remark dawned upon her slowly returning consciousness, and made answer in her usual complacent manner, "Why, Abbie, how can they? the clock is one of the family."

"Yes, I know," Abbie persisted, "but suppose, Ann, — just suppose that — "

"And besides," Ann went on, heedless of the interruption, "did not John and Mary say that we might take our necessary personal effects?"

"Yes, Ann! but did you notice the emphasis they put on *necessary*, Mary repeating it after her husband to make sure we understood?"

"Well, let's not worry about it, Abbie, 'twill be all right, I am sure."

Abbie resented the apathy with which her sister regarded the affair, and wondered, as she had wondered many times before, if there were any hidden depths to her sister's seemingly shallow nature — if her mind or body were capable of being stirred into activity. She thought not, and blamed herself for her over-indulgence, which was, no doubt, the cause of her younger sister's passiveness.

Though both had passed their threescore and ten, the winding of the clock at bedtime was still, as in their youth, an *event* in their

lives. They regarded it as a sacred obligation, handed down to them from parents and grandparents, and the sisters took turns in winding the heavy weights, performing the duty so faithfully that the clock had never, as yet, failed to count the minutes and strike the hours with regularity.

The sisters arose as the whirring of the wooden wheels gave warning that the hour of nine was about to strike. This had been their bedtime ever since they could remember.

It was Abbie's turn to wind the clock. Lovingly, almost caressingly, she performed the task, and lingered long before its yellow face, listening to the tick-tock which was music to her ears. When she turned she was alone.

On the morrow the sisters rose early, but their haggard faces bore witness that sleep had not visited their eyelids. At noon, from their chamber window, they saw their nephew's team turning into the yard.

"O Ann! 'tis Ben driving, and we can take the clock!"

"Of course," replied Ann, "you didn't really think we couldn't, did you?"

"Yes, Ann, I did, I felt sure that John and Mary would think it too shabby for their fine house, but, after it is once there, they won't bother to send it back.

"I feel a little mean about taking it, and if it were anything else but the clock, why I'd never," — but hearing the hired man's step in the kitchen, she did not stop to finish her remark, but hurried down the stairs and, before Ann reached the room, the clock was upon the table, wrapped securely in a thick shawl which shielded it from detection as well as from injury.

With comparatively light hearts they were driven to the big front door, where a warm welcome awaited them, and their last misgiving vanished as Ben was given the order to "take the bundles to the parlor-chamber."

With a cordial invitation to make themselves at home, they were ushered into their room. One glance revealed the fact that no pains had been spared to make them happy and comfortable. The easy chairs, the soft couch and the plump bed bespoke thoughtful care and consideration, and the aunts felt truly grateful to their benefactors.

After arranging their belongings, they drew up their chairs before the open fire and settled themselves comfortably.

The soft cushions felt good to their frail, tired bodies, and, as they sat lazily watching the curling flames and listening to the familiar tick of the old clock, drowsiness fell upon them, and they were soon fast asleep.

The sound of voices disturbed their slumbers. Of course it was a dream, for the voice seemed to come from the blaze which was roaring merrily up the chimney: "Take the old thing to the shed and, — sh ! not so loud, you'll wake the old ladies !"

But the old ladies had heard, and the significance of the unfinished sentence was beginning to dawn upon their sleepy senses.

After hearing the door close behind the departing footsteps, a pair of fadéd blue eyes and a pair of shiny black ones opened cautiously and looked around the room and then at each other. The old clock was gone !

A storm was coming on, and the aged spinsters drew their chairs close to the window, which overlooked the little house in the valley a full mile distant, and watched the gathering clouds. To their failing sight, the house was but an indistinct object, but they watched it with hungry, homesick eyes, through the scattering flakes. It looked lonely and desolate, and the gloom surrounding it sank deep into their sore hearts. Soon the fast-falling snow hid it from sight.

The fire still burned brightly, but, to these lonely hearts, the blaze had lost its cheerfulness. As they sat gazing with unseeing eyes into the dancing flames, the stillness of the room seemed well-nigh intolerable.

The sound of the tea-bell aroused them from their sombre reflections. They were glad when the meal was over, and bidding the family "good-night" at an early hour, prepared, at once, for bed.

"One bed time is as good as another now, I suppose," said Abbie, grimly referring for the first time to what was uppermost in both minds.

"Yes, I suppose it is," Ann answered meekly.

They closed their eyes and lay for a long time without moving, but sleep would not come.

The town clock struck "nine."

As the last stroke sounded, Ann with sudden decision, jumped from the bed and began to dress. Coming to the bedside she spoke. "Abbie, it is my turn, and I hear the old clock calling, calling to me. *I must find it!*"

Ann spoke calmly, but underneath the low, even tone, a determined note, wholly foreign to it, caused the elder sister to stare in speechless amazement at the dim figure bending over her.

"Don't follow me," and, with the words, Ann disappeared into the hall.

Abbie's strained ears heard the front door open and shut softly, and then all was still.

The minutes seemed like hours before the creak of the door was again heard, and Ann entered the room, bedraggled and covered with snow, her face fairly radiant with happiness as she placed upon the floor her hard-earned trophy.

"Get ready quick, Abbie!" she exclaimed, excitedly, "we must take it home tonight."

"But how?" began Abbie, —

"*We must run away!* The snow is not deep yet, and we can reach home in an hour."

As her sister still wavered, "We couldn't part with our life-long companion, could we?" Ann pleaded brokenly.

"No! no!" said Abbie, her heart sinking at the thought, "but can we get back here?"

Ann turned sharply upon her sister.

"I'm not coming back!" and putting her arms around the cold, dripping object upon the floor, she continued with great solemnity, "my years are nearly spent, but while I live this old clock shall bear me company."

For the first time in their lives, Ann now became the leader, giving her orders with the confident air of one who has but to speak to be obeyed.

After putting the room in order, they stole out, like thieves in the night, Ann clinging to her precious burden.

The snow grew deeper and deeper as they fought their way through the storm, and the thickly falling flakes blinded their eyes. Neither thought of turning back, however, but trudged

bravely on, hardly daring to stop to rest, for fear their stiffening limbs would refuse to go on.

The clock now became so heavy that they no longer "took turns," but bore the burden between them.

No thought of getting lost entered their minds, for, as a needle turns to its magnet, they trusted their feet to turn to the old home.

And their steps went true, for, with strength well spent but spirit undaunted, they reached the threshold.

The storm beat against the windows and made the old house tremble; the wind howled and the snow sifted through the crevices, but the old ladies were blissfully unconscious of aught save the musical tick of the old clock, in its accustomed place, as they lit the fire and made themselves comfortable for the night.

At the big house the next morning, Mary, her face pale with alarm, stood staring at the unruffled bed. She could account for the absence of the old ladies in but one way and, at the thought, she sank limply to the window-seat and looked out.

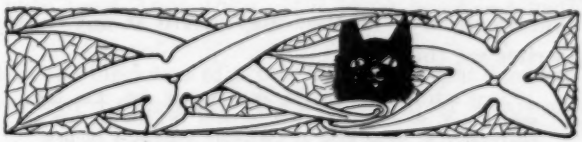
Under that smooth carpet of snow, shining and glistening in the morning sun, lay hidden a pitiful tragedy! As she followed its unbroken line down the valley, her color suddenly returned and tears of relief welled up in her eyes.

A faint line of smoke was issuing from the chimney of the little old house.

Within the tiny kitchen, the aged couple sat eating their breakfast of crackers and tea.

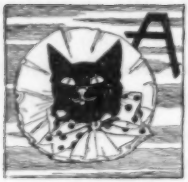
"Well, Ann," said Abbie, sipping her tea contentedly, "this old house is good for many years yet."

"Yes, — and the old clock too," said Ann.



The Luck of the Chaperon.*

BY ANNIE GREY BUTCHERT.



A GROAN of deepest consternation broke from Lincoln, as he let the last of his three letters flutter down into his plate of ham and eggs. His two companions paused in the perusal of their mail with a simultaneous "What's happened?"

"The worst," said Lincoln, in a voice of gloom. "That bunch of letters represents a combination of circumstances calculated to be the cause of any man's downfall."

"Isn't Miss Stanley coming?" asked Ross and Howard in a breath.

"She is," said Lincoln, with a very significant grimace, "it's worse than that."

"Impossible," chorused Ross and Howard in tones of relief.

"Aunt Julia can't come," explained Lincoln. "Her husband has contracted an untimely attack of gout and they are both tied up in Glasgow."

"Oh, is that all?" said Ross, turning to his delayed coffee.

"All! why, fellows, do you know what it means? There will be no chaperon to meet Miss Stanley and Miss Ripley when they come, and it isn't just the thing, even in this advanced age, for two young ladies to stay in a shooting-lodge in the heart of the Highlands alone with three young men, however well intentioned they may be, without a married female of some description in sight. The worst of it is, they may arrive at any time; Miss Stanley writes me thus:

> We will be with you on the 5th or 6th, I'm not sure which, so do not trouble to meet us; we can get a conveyance of some kind at Clanmore Village, I suppose. As for myself, you will have to keep me for a month. I am burning all my ships behind me, or rather, they are

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being burned for me, and I have really no part in the undesirable conflagration. Our home is sold, and Aunt and Uncle have gone to London to start afresh. We are poor now, you know. I don't mind telling people, for it's fashionable in our circle since that last slump in the cotton market. However, I have enough of last season's gowns to see me through a month in Scotland, and at the end of that time I am to become governess to Mrs. Rogers' twins, with the privilege of conversing in French with her three eldest daughters, all for as much annually as I used to spend on one ball gown. However, it's all very new and interesting—just yet. It is just possible that some of my "friends" may regard me as a "has been." If you find yourself among the number I shall not blame you—it is the world's way—only hint it very gently and I'll vanish.

"Now what in thunder shall we do?" appealed Lincoln.

Ross's dark eyes were suspiciously moist. He brought his clinched fist down on the table with a thud that made the china dance and shiver.

"They've got to come," he said savagely. "If we made any excuse now, Eugenie — Miss Stanley — might take it for the hint she speaks of. Poor girl, she's having a hard time of it, for all her cheerfulness. Fancy her governess to those snobs."

"But what about a chaperon? Surely you don't purpose — "

Howard's emotions had reached the point of explosion. He jumped to his feet, a wildly excited young man.

"I'm going to scour the countryside, with your consent, till I find a female of some kind to take the place of your Aunt Julia. There must be women of some kind within twenty miles. A whole month, Heaven knows what might not — happen — " The rest of his impassioned speech was cut off by the closing of the door behind him as he rushed into the hall after his outdoor garments. He thrust his head in a moment later to say:

"If they should arrive before I return tell them I'm taking a drive with your Aunt Julia. I'll bring home — something."

. . . . . .

Out of the blackness of a wet Highland night Howard stepped, dripping and disconsolate, with a great parcel in his arms — and alone.

"Where is the chaperon?" asked Lincoln and Ross, anxiously. Howard dumped the parcel on the floor and kicked it over to Lincoln.

"There she is," he said, as he sank wearily into a chair before the fire. Lincoln ripped the parcel open, displaying a collection of women's clothes. He picked up a wrapper of bright crimson cashmere with trimmings of coarse black lace.

"Is this the best you could do?" he asked, with a queer smile.

"It is," said Howard. "I've interviewed every woman within a radius of ten miles. I've offered small fortunes, and told the most heart-weakening lies, but not one of them would come to the Cove — they say it's haunted. I've begged, borrowed and stolen those duds."

"She seems rather limp," said Ross reflectively inspecting the wrapper. "As if she needed stuffing. Have we the material?"

"We have," said Howard, with a dramatic wave of the hand that included the three of them.

"Oh, I say — it's a good size, but it would hardly accommodate the three of us," observed Ross.

"We'll draw for it," said Howard. "You fellows get some slips of paper." Lincoln and Ross went into the den adjoining, and soon returned with three slips of paper in a hat. "The one who draws the paper with the cross marked on it takes the bundle and becomes Aunt Julia, pro tem. Aunt Julia will only be visible to the naked eye of the ladies occasionally, and at a good, safe distance. In the meantime she will be suffering from some feminine complaint which keeps her confined to her room most of the time."

"Lockjaw," suggested Ross, "Then she won't be expected to talk."

"No woman ever had that," objected Lincoln.

"Housemaid's knee," said Howard. "A man couldn't possibly have that."

"That will do fine," said Lincoln. "Here, boys, take your draw." Lincoln held out his hat and the three gravely drew out the slips of paper. Howard was the first to hold his out. There was a tiny cross marked on it. He groaned. "Heavens! What luck, to travel ten miles for those instruments of torture, and then have to wear them, and shave twice a day. Boys, see that a good supply of cigars are sent to my room, and don't forget the port; it's a sure cure for housemaid's knee."

In less than half an hour the rattle of wheels came through the din of the storm, and Lincoln and Ross opened the door and let the light flood out into the night, showing one solitary figure, drenched and shivering, with a sweet, tired face that wore a smile in defiance of wind and weather.

"You're — you're not alone?" gasped Lincoln, by way of greeting.

Miss Stanley slipped out of her dripping ulster, and shook the rain from her hat. "All alone, except for the driver, who has gone to beg a night's shelter from your man. Miss Ripley could not come, her mother — " Lincoln heard no more. He retired into a dark corner to say things to himself. To have two single ladies unchaperoned beneath his roof had seemed bad — very bad — but to have one, alone, on a night into which it would be cruel to turn a dog for half an hour, was of that variety of badness which forbids audible mention.

"I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Lincoln's aunt," Miss Stanley was saying to Ross, who was doing his best for her comfort, "I hope she is well."

"Well — er — no," stammered Ross. "Perhaps to-morrow — she is suffering from — " Ross looked wildly around for Lincoln to help him out.

"Housemaid's knee," said Lincoln, with desperate promptness.

"Oh," commented Miss Stanley, in a startled voice, and then the corners of her mouth sank into two pretty dimples, and her eyes puckered in a very unsympathetic way.

"Aunt Julia begs that you will excuse her for this evening," said Lincoln. "The weather has a very bad effect on her — ailment."

A queer little gurgling laugh broke from Miss Stanley's pretty lips, as she turned her head to the fire, and Howard, in the next room, struggling with the red wrapper, in case he should be needed, gave a sigh of relief that burst off a button, as the reprieve reached his ears. His opinion as to who was getting the worst of it was changing.

. . . . . .

"If the weather clears we'll send her home to-morrow," said Lincoln, gloomily, as, Miss Stanley having retired, the three guilt-

stricken conspirators sat in Howard's room, viewing and reviewing the situation. Howard, with a queer little black silk cap, edged with gray curls, pushed back on his well-shaped blond head, and the red wrapper comfortably unbuttoned at the neck and waist, sat with his feet up on the dresser. Lincoln and Ross had laughed themselves into tears at the first sight of him, and the reaction had left them in despair.

"For Heaven's sake do," said Howard. "One day buttoned up in this thing, big as it is, would cut me in two. If you have the breakfast room good and dark in the morning, I'll make my appearance — positively one appearance only. You fellows clear out, and I'll explain how unexpected complications have begun to do business in my knee, necessitating my removal to the hospital to have my leg amputated — that sounds all right doesn't it? Of course, being a young lady of rare perception, she will see the situation at once and take her departure. If Miss Ripley had come we could have managed some way, but it is cruel kindness to keep her here alone. As she is to spend one night here, it will be better for her peace of mind to let her go away without knowing the truth."

Breakfast next morning was eaten in a "dim, religious light." At its close "Aunt Julia" hobbled with a most melancholy limp into the room, the red wrapper straining dangerously at the waist buttons, and the gray curls bobbing into her eyes from beneath the little silk cap. The mittened hand almost crushed Miss Stanley's slim fingers, and Aunt Julia's voice was alarmingly faint as she bade her guest welcome. Miss Stanley's eyes flew open to their widest extent for a moment, and then the long lashes hid the light within them — a light that made the three men turn hot all over and long to answer with a shout of laughter. There was no laughter, however, at that meal. The nearest approach to it was the deepening of the dimples at the corners of Miss Stanley's mouth. Lincoln and Ross kept up a desperate chatter that betrayed the anxiety of their souls, and Aunt Julia groaned occasionally, as she carefully lifted one leg over the other.

Lincoln and Ross got through their breakfast with surprising rapidity, and excused themselves, leaving Aunt Julia to adjust things with Miss Stanley.

Whatever may have been said over the coffee cups was not of a nature to hurt Miss Stanley's feelings. That much Lincoln gathered from the brightness of her face as she joined him in the hall half an hour after. She spoke pleasantly about the prospects for a fine day, but said no word about leaving the Cove. The men were puzzled, but dared not broach the subject, not knowing what turn Howard's plans might have taken. As an opening for her confidence, Lincoln invited her to take a walk after lunch, but she thanked him and declined, saying she had promised to drive with Aunt Julia.

"Howard is going to see her on the train himself," concluded Lincoln. "He always was a fine fellow to get a friend out of a hole."

"But won't Miss Stanley be rather suspicious after the tale he told her about his knee being worse?" said Ross, who would have welcomed an earthquake, if it might be the means of keeping Miss Stanley under the same roof as himself.

"Possibly, but what matters that, so that he gets her safely and happily away? We should have told her the truth in the first place."

. . . . . .

Aunt Julia might have been taken for a woman disguised as a man, or a man disguised as a woman, according to circumstances, as she came downstairs dressed in a long Inverness ulster and a deer-stalker cap.

Miss Stanley came down directly after, and they climbed up into the rattling old dog-cart and drove away, leaving two very lonely, and very much puzzled, young men behind them.

"Strange she didn't say good-bye to us," said Ross, as they watched the cart growing dim in the foggy distance.

"Evidently Howard has not told her yet, and is going to do so on the way to the station," reasoned Lincoln.

But Miss Stanley did not go away that day. Instead, she was back in time to appear at dinner, looking bright and lovely in a gown of pure white, with a white flower in her hair. The hearts of her two companions glowed within them, in spite of previous misgivings, at sight of her. There was a subdued buoyancy about her — a half-concealed, half-expressed something shining in her

eyes and toning her words and laughter — that made them wonder, and each vowed, privately, that if she stayed forever they would make no effort to banish her.

"I hadn't the heart to do it, boys," said Howard, when they asked him to explain. "I would rather play Aunt Julia forever."

After that began a silent struggle between Lincoln and Ross as to who should be her escort when she walked or drove. Ross managed to take her walking over the hills the next morning, and Lincoln arranged to drive her to a neighboring town in the afternoon. He was disappointed, however. Miss Stanley could not go. "Aunt Julia had promised to show her how to knit a breakfast shawl, and as Aunt Julia seemed to like her company, it was her duty to do what she could to lighten her affliction and loneliness."

Lincoln gasped. Howard was surpassing himself. "He always was a good actor, but how in the world does he make good when he promises a thing like that?" said Ross.

"He must have accomplishments of which we know nothing," answered Lincoln.

At the end of a week Ross and Lincoln consulted together and decided that the friendship that had sprung up between Miss Stanley and Aunt Julia was becoming alarming, if not suspicious. Any morning the gentlemen might have the pleasure of Miss Stanley's company, but all her afternoons and evenings were devoted to Aunt Julia. Aunt Julia's head ached, and Miss Stanley was going to bathe it, or Aunt Julia had promised to show her how to make Scotch shortcake, or Aunt Julia wanted to learn the shell stitch for babies' bonnets, until the very name of Aunt Julia became a horror. And now the night had come when Howard was to be remonstrated with for monopolizing the company of Miss Stanley.

Howard rarely joined them at dinner, but this evening he had done so, and sat with them in the parlor afterwards. Ross and Lincoln meant to tackle him after Miss Stanley had gone.

Thus it was that they were all together when a rig drove up to the door. Visitors at the Cove were rare, specially at night, and they had not recovered from their surprise when the parlor door opened and the real Aunt Julia stood before them. Lincoln tried to rise, but consternation held him bound to his chair. Aunt Julia

was a small woman, but with a very large presence, and on this occasion it was magnified till it seemed to fill the room. Her little black eyes looked around from beneath heavy gray brows, in a way that seemed to say, "Don't tell me any lies; I can see it all."

"What's that?" she asked, abruptly, pointing a thin finger, a-sparkle with rings, at Howard, who was trying to escape unseen from the room.

No one gave an answer, and indeed the lady waited for none.

"Who's that young woman?" she asked, turning the finger on Miss Stanley, who, pale and bereft of smiles and dimples, clung to a friendly window curtain.

Lincoln pulled himself together and rose to his feet.

"This, my dear Aunt, is Miss Stanley, of whom I wrote you."

"And what is she doing here without a chaperon?"

Lincoln threw an appealing glance at Howard, that stopped the latter in his wild rush for a door.

"This lady kindly consented to act as chaperon till you came. She—"

"Tut!" spluttered Aunt Julia, as she strode across the room towards Howard. Before she reached him, the red wrapper was lying around his feet, and he was bowing to her with the little black silk cap and the dangling gray curls in his hand.

"I knew it," she said, with obvious meaning. "Stand up here." She waved her hand with a gesture that brought the three young men promptly before her.

"What this disgraceful conduct may mean, I do not know, but one of you young men must marry this young woman in the morning—which one will you have, Miss?" turning to Miss Stanley.

Quickly the color, and the smiles, and the dimples came back to Miss Stanley's face as she let go of her supporting curtain and moved a little nearer the group. Lincoln and Ross sprang quickly forward, eager desire on their faces, while Howard stood looking on with a queer smile.

"If Miss Stanley would do me the honor," said Lincoln.

"Or me!" echoed Ross.

Miss Stanley stood slipping a ring back and forth on her finger.

"I'm very sorry, but I'm already married," she said, demurely.

"Married! to whom?" It would be hard to tell who asked the question with the most interest.

"To," Miss Stanley nodded her head at Howard, "The Chaperon," she said.

Howard crossed the room and took Miss Stanley's hand in his. "We were married in Clanmore Church the day after her arrival here."

"And what's the meaning of that?" asked the old lady, pointing to the wrapper.

"Oh, just a little masquerade," laughed Howard.

"Then why don't you two clear out and leave those two to enjoy their honeymoon?" said Aunt Julia, turning to Lincoln and Ross. And then Howard knew why Lincoln thought so much of his Aunt, in spite of her queer ways.

"Here's a present for you, young lady," she went on, jerking a beautiful ring of pearls from among its companions on her finger. "I wish you good luck. I'll go back to Glasgow in the morning, and you two young men will go with me."

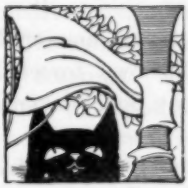
"I want to confess," said Lincoln, when Aunt Julia had taken the bride away with her, and left the men alone. "When you drew that slip of paper which entitled you to become Aunt Julia, you had no chance — all the slips were marked with a cross. We thought, as it was you who had arranged the scheme, that you should be the victim of it."

"I know it," said Howard, quietly. "I found the slips next morning, where you had thrown them, on the hearth. That's why I did not mind fooling you a little — Eugenie was willing. She knew me the moment she set eyes on me, though she never expected to meet me here. We were sweethearts long ago, and but for this turn of affairs might never have made it up. It was the best way — and for me the happiest way — out of an awkward situation, with a little revenge on the side. I think you must admit that I have had the best of the joke."

And Lincoln and Ross, with sighs that came from their hearts, admitted that he certainly had.

A Social Somersault.*

BY GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER.



IT was not from choice that Mr. William Adsum became butler to his own butler. It was an honor that was thrust upon him as an incident of his life and death battle in X. Y. & Z. railroad stock. The bear element was after his scalp — had been for over a year — and every cent he could rake and scrape together had been used to preserve his credit in the Street. The butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, even his very servants, were unpaid, so hard run he had been. The turn of the tide was in sight now, however, and it suited the generalship of the crafty fighter to disappear, for a time, from the haunts of bulls and bears. Only his broker knew that the master of financial strategy had quietly withdrawn to his new and little known summer retreat, where a wire and a tinkling bell kept him in touch with feverish Wall Street.

It is possible, even for a man whose wealth is estimated in millions, to be hard up for ready cash. Mr. Adsum realized this when his butler, during the second week of his retirement, suddenly appeared in the study and demanded his pay.

"What with settling for one month and then skipping one or two, sir, you owe us upwards of six months' wages, and we want it," said the butler. "We make no complaint about having to do double duty while here in the country," he went on. "I'm willing to accommodate, though it *is* a hardship for a man of my standing in service to act as footman, and even valet. Yes sir, even valet!"

"So that's where the shoe pinches, eh, James?" suggested Mr. Adsum with a dry smile.

"Not at all, sir, not *at* all!" replied James, with a haste and emphasis which left no doubt whatever that the sore spot had been

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touched. "I'm always willing to accommodate. Why, sir, I even learned to drop my 'haitches' to please Mrs. Von Plott, who wanted an English butler."

"Yes, I know," gloomily replied the other. "I gave you a raise of ten dollars a month for that."

"But I don't get it!" protested James. "And I want it. We all want our money."

"I'm sorry, James, but I haven't got it just now," answered Mr. Adsum, meeting the humiliating issue in his own forceful way. "You'll have to allow me to pay you at my own convenience. That will be all at present."

"Begging your pardon, sir, but I'm not through talking yet," said James with unexpected boldness. "There's another way you can settle with us, right today. You and your family can trade places with us below stairs for one week!"

"What!" gasped Mr. Adsum.

"Yes, sir. We've talked it all over in the kitchen, sir, and we've made up our minds that we'd rather have a week of feeling how it seems to be waited on than to have our money. Now there's you, can take my place, Mrs. Adsum can go down in the kitchen as cook, Mr. Cyril can be coachman, Miss Grace the maid, and Mrs. Von Plott can be governess of her own children."

Mr. Adsum would have stopped this speech right in the beginning, but he was so much astounded that he could only splutter.

"James, you are discharged!" he exclaimed, with his first controllable breath. "Leave the room and tell the others that they may pack up and get out at once!"

"Very well, sir," said James, turning at the door. "But I'm very much afraid some of the others will return to the city and tell all the help they know, and afterwards bring suit for their money. I shall give you an hour to decide, sir."

Left to himself, Mr. Adsum fumed and paced the floor for a while, but he was not given to the rage that blinds — no man can be swayed by that and succeed in Wall Street — and, as he cooled off, he became thoughtful. If those five told all the servants they knew, that they had been dismissed by the Adsums with six months' pay coming to them, the wives of all his business associates would know it before night, and the husband of every one

of these wives would know it before the next morning. Then where would his credit be? He might borrow, but he did not dare to cripple his credit with a loan for paltry hundreds when he might, nay, probably would, need it for hundreds of thousands at the coming crisis in his affairs. His account at his own bank was already overdrawn, and another over-check would strain his credit there. The outlook was rather gloomy.

He called a family council, and explained the dilemma in all its bearings. To his surprise he did not meet with the expected storm of opposition. His wife eagerly assured him that it would be a pleasure to get into the kitchen after twenty years of absence, and declared that she could cook now as well as she did in the days when they lived in a tiny rented cottage and had no help at all. Cyril didn't mind — it would be good sport for a while, and he liked horses anyway. Grace thought it would be a lark — moreover, it would do the maid good to be shown how the work should be done. Mrs. Von Plott, the married daughter, was the only one of the quintet who recoiled in horror from the idea.

"I should never, never get over the indignity of it," she wailed, "and, besides, suppose it should ever be found out!"

"As for the indignity, it wouldn't be the first one from which you have recovered," retorted her father, with pointed allusion to the absent Von Plott, the family gold brick, who, with his bogus title on his calling cards, was just then trotting about the country on the trail of an actress with whom he was smitten. "And if the thing gets found out we will let you claim it as an eccentric whim of ours. If it should become known just now, however, you are likely to have the pleasure of acting as governess to your own children for the balance of your life, and of earning a living for them besides. I'm going to send for James, now, and see if I can't avoid this thing, but if I can't, I'm going to give in. And I bet you I'll make the best butler that ever drew a cork."

At this moment there was an interruption in the family council, in the person of Miss Wilmer, the governess.

"Please pardon me for intruding," she breathlessly began, "but I want you to know that I have no part in this — this absurd plan of James's, and —"

"Did you take part in the conference, downstairs, about demanding the money?" coldly interrupted Mr. Adsum.

"Yes, sir," she acknowledged, coloring and casting an appealing glance at the others in turn, excepting Cyril, to whom she paid no attention whatever. "My mother needs all the money I can send her, but——"

"That will do, then," broke in Mr. Adsum. "You shall have your taste of social elevation with the others."

"But——"

"Miss Wilmer, you will please return to the nursery until Mrs. Von Plott comes to take your place!"

She gave one more appealing glance at the family circle. She had meant to make a decided stand, but catching the eye of Cyril, she fled.

Mr. Adsum was unable to make a compromise with James. It was either cash on the nail or the social cataclysm, and Mr. Adsum chose the latter.

"And now, James," he inquired, "When do you intend to begin your — er — your taste of high life?"

"Why, right away, sir," replied the butler. "The fact is that the maid and the coachman have already laid off their liveries, and the cook has got on her silk dress. You will, of course, Mr. Adsum, put on my livery — you and I are about of a size — and will expect to be called William."

Mr. Adsum winced, but he was widely known as a "game" man.

"Go and change your clothes at once," he said.

Half an hour later the social upheaval was complete, and some curious ideas developed. It transpired that Mrs. Meacham's conception of wealth was to have nothing whatever to do, and she sat on the front porch, in all her finery, rocking and humming, "The Wearin' o' th' Green," in huge content. Mrs. Meacham was the cook.

Miss Perkins's dream of bliss was to loll in a hammock and read a novel — like a perfect lady — and she did it. Miss Perkins was the maid.

Mr. Puffing's ideal was to have a clear and unbroken field for his dignity, and, as a starter, he went into the study and sat at

the reading table in stiff state. Mr. Puffing was the butler, erstwhile James.

Mr. Sam Banks had air castles that centred around plenty to drink. Mr. Banks was the coachman, and he came into the study with his hat on and rang the bell. Mr. Adsum came promptly. Mr. Puffing noted with complacency that the new butler was not half so fine a figure in livery as himself, being too large of girth and too small of calf. The livery did not fit him well, and he looked very awkward, though cheerful.

"William," said Mr. Banks, "a couple of highballs."

Mr. Adsum bowed with admirable stiffness and left the room.

"Sam, —" began Mr. Puffing.

"Mr. Banks!" corrected Sam.

"Quite right," acknowledged Mr. Puffing. "Mr. Banks, you ought to take off your hat, and take your hands out of your pockets, and not sit astraddle of a chair that way. Act aristocratic. Observe me. Do as I do!"

Sam made no answer, but he took off his hat and otherwise followed Mr. Puffing's masterly directions.

Mr. Adsum returned in due season with a decanter of whiskey, two clinking goblets, ice, and a bottle of mineral water. With grave care he made the highballs and presented them to the two gentlemen.

"Here's looking at you," said Mr. Banks to Mr. Puffing.

"To your very good health," replied Mr. Puffing with easy grace, and they drank.

"I never did care for it this way very much," observed Mr. Banks, eyeing his empty glass. "I like it straight for mine. You can just leave the liquor here, William."

Mr. Adsum looked at Mr. Puffing with a shade of perplexity. Sam and whiskey had never made a very good combination. Mr. Puffing recognized the cause of the worried look and gave his butler pro tem a meaning nod, whereupon Mr. Adsum withdrew, much relieved.

Mr. Banks poured out a half tumbler of the liquor.

"I hope, Sam —" began Mr. Puffing.

"*Mr.* Banks!" gruffly corrected Sam.

"Quite right," Mr. Banks, excuse me. I was just going to say,

Mr. Banks, that I hope you won't spoil everything with too much of that stuff."

"Look here, Mr. Puffing," said Sam, "I hope you don't get the idea that you're the boss of the whole shebang!"

"Well, no," judiciously rejoined Mr. Puffing, "but you must remember that, having taken Mr. Adsum's place, I am to be considered the head of the household."

"You just remember this much then, Puffing," retorted Sam. "If you start in to boss me, I'm a-going to punch the head of the household's head off! You hear *me!*"

Mr. Puffing avoided this issue, but he was a deep, deep strategist.

"I wonder," he remarked by and by, "if Cyril knows how to manage that sore you was telling me about on Prince's off hind leg."

Mr. Banks was up like a Jack-in-the-box.

"Sure *not!*" he exclaimed. "I'll have to tell him about that," and pausing only to drain his glass he hurried off to the stables, whereupon Mr. Puffing promptly hid the decanter.

Mr. Adsum, in the meantime, went up to the nursery, where he found Mrs. Von Plott calmly reading by the window, while Miss Wilmer, still wearing her gray gown and white collar, was down on the floor playing with the twins.

"Jennie," he abruptly said to Mrs. Von Plott, "you will please put on a costume as near like Miss Wilmer's as possible, and let Miss Wilmer come down stairs."

Then he stalked out, leaving Mrs. Von Plott tearfully resigned, and Miss Wilmer fearful lest their mother might do something foolish to tear down her own careful work on the health and training of the twins. A little later she stole down stairs in a soft lavender dress that Grace Adsum had insisted on loaning her.

"Because I want you to look just as nice as possible," said Grace, and Miss Wilmer blushed, just on general principles.

The Adsums were so hopelessly unfashionable, even to the young folks, except for Mrs. Von Plott. And they were of the new rich, too, which makes it all the more strange.

As Miss Wilmer descended into the hall, Mr. Puffing sauntered out on the porch to pay his respects to Mrs. Meacham.

"How do you find yourself, Mrs. Meacham?" he inquired with courtly solicitude.

"It's a little oneasy I am, thank ye kindly," replied Mrs. Meacham, sniffing the air. "I'm thinkin' all the time I do be smellin' somewhat a-burnin' in th' kitchen beyant."

"Merely imagination, I should judge, madam," rejoined Mr. Puffing. "Have you given orders for dinner yet?"

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed Mrs. Meacham. "Now, man, I'd clane forgot ut. An' there's a fine pair o' fowls down there, too!" And she bustled back to give Mrs. Adsum her orders.

In the kitchen Mrs. Meacham found Mrs. Adsum with a big apron on and her sleeves rolled up, positively happy in the making of some cherry pies.

"I've just come down to tell ye, ma'am," said the ex-cook, with a bob of courtesy which she could not help, "that there's two nate fowls in th' ice box for dinner."

"That's fine!" said Mrs. Adsum, her eyes sparkling with pleasurable anticipation. "How would it be to make an old-fashioned stew?"

"Not wid thim fowls, ma'am," Mrs. Meacham decidedly objected, and going to the refrigerator she brought out the chickens. "They'd cook up tough in a stew, thim fowls would," she went on, examining them with the eye and thumb of a connoisseur, "but in a roast, now, ma'am, I'll show ye how to cook thim tindher an' schwate — an' there's a new dressin' I've been wantin' t' thry. Instead o' usin' sage, now, ye —" and Mrs. Meacham went deep into the mysteries of the new dressing, with Mrs. Adsum a delighted listener. Soon after the two women were working side by side, contentedly planning and executing a perfect orgy of cooking.

Miss Perkins was the only one of the lot who finished the day consistently. She lolled in the hammock until dinner, and after dinner played the piano and sang most hideously until bed time — like a perfect lady. The others all had lapses.

Miss Wilmer, for instance, upon coming down stairs had ensconced herself in the hall to read, but at the first cry from little Helen, her favorite twin, went back up, two steps at a time — and stayed there. Sam Banks, out in the barn in his best clothes,

carefully bandaged Prince's off hind foot, while Cyril handed him liniment. Mr. Puffing got along without a break until dinner time. There he took his place at the head of the table in solemn decorum, and first admired and then grew almost jealous of the dignified and capable manner in which the new butler acquitted himself. But when Mr. Adsum started to carve the fowls, Mr. Puffing cheered up, for the delicate operation was being most atrociously performed. For the most part, joints refused to come off in the right places at all, and when they did they were ragged and frayed. Mr. Puffing squirmed uneasily until, at last, his professional instincts got the better of him, and he thrust Mr. Adsum aside to carve and serve the fowls himself, in sedate but exultant pride of his own grace and skill.

It was a most interesting dinner. Mr. Puffing's ease was spoiled by a sense of responsibility and an uneasy following of Mr. Adsum's work. He had an almost uncontrollable impulse to get up and do things himself, so they should be properly done. Mrs. Meacham was the greatest thorn in Mr. Puffing's side. She sat down with a haughty pride enough, but, from the moment that Mr. Adsum handed her the soup until dessert was served, she was in a most uncomfortable state of continual apology. Mr. Banks ate with his knife and did other things of note in perfect unconcern. Miss Wilmer was silent, constrained and miserable. Miss Perkins acted like a perfect lady, and more so. Mr. Banks finished by drinking entirely too much wine and calling Mr. Adsum "William, old boy!"

After that Mr. Adsum retired to the servants' dining hall with a good appetite for his own dinner, sat down at the table with his wife, son and daughter, and laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks. Mrs. Von Plott took her dinner in the nursery.

The incidents of the following morning were not so joyous, though there were redeeming features. Mrs. Meacham furnished the first one. Awakening at the usual time, she sleepily dressed herself and stumbled down to the kitchen before she remembered that now she was the mistress. Being there, however, she concluded that she might as well get breakfast, and Mrs. Adsum found her at it, humming "The Wearin' o' th' Green."

"It's a fine cup o' coffee I've got ready for ye, ma'am," she

said. "Drink ut, ma'am. It'll do ye good if ye had as bad a night as me. Sure, I couldn't get used to your fine, soft bed, an' I couldn't schlape till th' stroke o' wan. If ye don't mind, ma'am, I'll go back to me own bed th' night."

Mr. Puffing, after a night's sleep over the situation, ordered his shaving water with sufficient gravity, but received it with such an obvious struggle between apology and authority that Mr. Adsum turned away chuckling.

Mrs. Von Plott awoke in the nursery to find Miss Wilmer dressing the twins and telling them a pretty fairy story, inspired by the freshness of the dew through which she had taken her customary morning walk.

Aside from these three events the morning was painful to all concerned. Mr. Banks awoke with a headache from the widely assorted drinks of the night before, and rang for a cocktail and a pitcher of ice water with vicious impatience. Mr. Adsum brought them up in a very thoughtful frame of mind, but Mr. Puffing met him in the hall and carried them in to Mr. Banks, being roundly cursed by that gentleman for his pains. Miss Perkins rang for the maid, and Grace Adsum needed all her keen sense of humor to sustain her in the ordeal that followed, Miss Perkins having read in certain paper novels that perfect ladies always dressed in a tantrum.

Mr. Banks, having attired himself and breakfasted in a manner to increase the deep thoughtfulness of the new butler, sent out for the coachman to saddle Black Robert, and objected to the manner of saddling in such surly fashion that Cyril dug his finger nails into his palms all the way back to the stables. Miss Perkins shortly after ordered the phaeton up for a morning drive, and dictated that the coachman should attend in livery. She was dressed in all her jewelry, and she shot Cyril a very melting glance as he handed her into the carriage.

In about half an hour they returned and Miss Perkins was furious. Cyril had been forced to tell her that it was not considered good form to address so much general and personal conversation to the coachman!

Mrs. Adsum sat complacently rocking on the porch when they drew up to the porte-cochère. She had burned a scar on her

hand, and Mrs. Meacham, in remorse, had driven her from the kitchen for good. Miss Perkins sailed majestically past her and met Mr. Adsum in the hall.

"William," said she, "go out and tell the cook to get off the front porch and go back where she belongs. The very idea!"

Mr. Adsum looked after her in deeper thoughtfulness than ever, but he took out a footstool for his wife and omitted the message.

Cyril was driving back to the barn when Grace, with a broom in her hand and a dainty dust-cap on her head, stopped him and whispered something that made him warmly grasp her hand.

"Grace, you're a brick!" he exclaimed, and drove back into the porte-cochère just as Miss Wilmer came out on the porch with little Helen and Hal.

"I believe, Miss Wilmer," said Cyril, touching his hat, "that this is your hour for driving with the children."

She flushed and drew back for a moment, then smiled as an idea came.

"I will go and tell the governess," she said demurely, and hurried up the stairs. It was the first time she had admitted Mrs. Von Plott's claim to the title.

Cyril bit his lips, then laughed and turned to his mother.

"She's sharp as a tack," he observed.

"She's a good girl all the way through," said his mother, warmly.

Miss Wilmer unexpectedly returned, looking embarrassed.

"What's the matter?" asked Cyril with a mischievous smile. "Is the governess ill?"

"Mrs. Von Plott has a headache," she explained, and nervously allowed him to help the children and herself into the phaeton.

"Miss Wilmer," said Cyril, turning to her as soon as they were out of sight of the house, "how soon are you going to marry me?"

"Never," she assured him, catching her breath.

"Why, that's what you told me last week, and all the other times," he protested. "Move the date a little nearer this time, please."

"Mr. Adsum," she said, with a little quaver in her voice, "why

will you take advantage of your position to torment me so? Why will you not remember our social difference?"

"It is rather presumptuous in a coachman, I'll admit," he replied with a significant smile at his plush trimmed sleeve.

"Please don't allude to this distressing farce," she answered. "Tomorrow it will be over, and if I were weak enough to marry you I should be classed as a fortune hunter all my life. And please don't drive me away from here. It is not generous of you and it is not manly. If you will not consider me, however, think of your own family."

Cyril laughed comfortably.

"That's a pretty good joke," he said. "With the sole exception of Jennie — Mrs. Von Plott, I mean — I hope she'll pardon me for omitting the title — we have no 'family' worth mentioning. Father and mother, as you know, are just as simple and unspoiled as they were when they were poor, and as for Grace, why bless her heart! she gave me the hint to take you on this very drive. She just aches to have you for a sister. But I know what is the matter. I began to propose to you about six months ago. In the past year father has had a pretty shaky time of it, and he may fail at any moment. I don't blame you. I'm not a very good speculation."

It was ungentlemanly of him, and he winced as he said it, but it had the effect that he had carefully counted upon.

"Cyril!" she cried, and impulsively clasped her hand upon his arm. "How could you!"

He clasped her hand as she removed it. If she had not loved him she would have been insulted, indignant at the brutal suggestion. As it was she was only hurt — deeply hurt!

"Then you do care for me!" he exulted. "I am sure of it now!"

"It — it wasn't fair," she protested, "but — but it doesn't alter the case any."

"No, not much," he admitted, "except that I'm going to marry you, that's all."

"You might wait to get my consent," she replied with a tremulous attempt at retort, but he paid no attention to it, whatever. She began to be admiringly afraid that he would keep his word.

She had to laugh, presently, in spite of herself. This was not at all like the wooing that she had always imagined she would have.

When Cyril reached the stables after this drive he found Mr. Banks waiting for him in a quarrelsome mood.

"Look here, Cyril," Sam roughly demanded, "didn't you know better than to hitch up Lady Jane so soon after that accident?"

Cyril bit his lips, but made no reply.

In the phaeton lay Miss Wilmer's lace handkerchief, and they both reached for it at once. Cyril got it and put it in his pocket with such haste that the other smiled meaningly.

"Bein' a coachman ain't so bad when it comes to drivin' some o' th' ladies, eh?" he remarked, with a leer.

"You miserable whelp!" exclaimed Cyril. "I'm going to stop this infernal foolishness right now!"

It was a beautiful scrimmage. When it was over, Cyril called for some refreshments. James served them in the study, and joined, at Mr. Adsum's invitation.

"Here's to your good health, gentlemen," James proposed. "Every man to his trade, say I, and Mrs. Meacham says the same to me not above an hour ago. I've been with you now for fifteen years, Mr. Adsum, under the best of treatment, and I can't seem to feel comfortable with seeing you in that livery, so if you'll just take it off and allow me, I'll wear it myself from now on."

"I hope you'll wear it for another fifteen years, James," said Mr. Adsum cordially. Whatever more he might have said was interrupted by the telephone bell.

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Adsum at the 'phone. "X. Y. & Z. up twelve points since last night? Great! And still rising? Immense!" "The whole bear crowd on the run, eh? Have a cigar, Allen! Have two cigars! And say, close out my holdings in U. V. & W. and transfer the proceeds to my account at the Standard National Bank. I'm through with that stock now. I'll be with you tomorrow, and we'll wipe that Dollerby crowd clean off the Street!"

"James," continued Mr. Adsum briskly, hanging up the receiver, "call the servants up here. I'm going to pay them all off right now."

He had written out five checks by the time they all gathered.

Grace came in with Miss Wilmer, and Mrs. Adsum came to speak a word for Mrs. Meacham if it should be needed.

"I suppose I'm let go," said Sam, taking his check with one hand, while he covered his left eye with his other palm, "but I want to say I'm genuine sorry for what I done, just the same. I oughtn't to drink anything stronger than water. I've been properly licked, but I don't bear no malice for it. Mr. Cyril is a gentleman, all right, and he puts up a grand good fight. But I — I'm sorry to leave the horses, sir. I don't think you'll find anybody to understand Prince and Black Robert like I do. I — I just plumb love them horses, sir!"

"Let him stay, father," urged Cyril.

"Certainly," assented Mr. Adsum. "Sam, your first duty will be to drive Miss Perkins to the station."

What Miss Perkins said does not matter.

"I hope to have the others remain with us," said Mr. Adsum.

"You'll have to get a new governess," announced Cyril, "because I'm going to marry Miss Wilmer as soon as we get back to the city," and reaching back he caught her gently but firmly by the wrist, and drew her up within convenient reach to put his arm around her."

"You've been a long while about it," said his father. "When I was your age I didn't waste so much time. Come here, girl, and kiss your father."

But motherly Mrs. Adsum already had Miss Wilmer in her arms, and Cyril, by way of passing the time, kissed his sister, then his mother and Miss Wilmer.

As for Miss Wilmer, she cried. What else could she do?

Mugsie, the Unwashed.*

BY W. HANSON DURHAM.

MUGSIE was happy, but hungry. Unkempt, unshorn and unwashed, he slid from the side door of an empty cattle car and stood for a moment looking cautiously about.

It was noon; the little freight yard at Coaltown was deserted, save for the crew of the freight train just arrived and several section hands, who were eating their tin-pail dinner in the shade of a distant lumber pile beside the track.

It was hot too, and the sharp, dry cinders seemed to scorch through the thin soles of Mugsie's old shoes as he skulked stealthily along between the strings of empty freight cars toward the little town beyond.

"Gee! I never was so hungry but once — and this is the once," sighed Mugsie seriously, as he left the freight yard and strolled aimlessly down the one principal street of Coaltown. His hands were thrust down deep into the pockets of a most pathetic pair of trousers, and his dilapidated derby was set at a dangerous degree over his left eye, as he stalked serenely along, a most disreputable, disheveled specimen of degradation, but not of desperation or despair, for his designs were deliberate and decisive.

Mugsie had arrived. Straight down the street he sauntered, a bland smile of serene self-satisfaction spreading over his homely bearded mug — a smile which he meant to be most amiable as he crossed over and lounged lazily up before a portly and prosperous looking personage who stood on the top step of the hotel smoking a fat after-dinner cigar.

"Say, pard!" began Mugsie, with a most seductive smile, as he approached. "You hain't got a quarter you want to invest in a dead sure thing, have you?"

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The stranger looked quickly up at him and then began to grin almost sneeringly.

"In what?" he drawled slowly, as he sized up the object before him.

"In me!" stated Mugsie, smiling seriously back at him. "For a quarter, I'll turn you in the biggest dollar's worth o' work on your investment. What do you say, boss?"

The man made no reply, but stood smoking indifferently, and then he turned suddenly to Mugsie and snorted.

"Say! You are a bird, ain't you? What do you want a quarter for — booze?"

"Hardly!" retorted Mugsie, quickly. "I never drink on an empty stummick. I'd surely squander it on every foolish thing I saw — on wild and riotous living. I'm hungry!"

"Humph!" grunted the stranger, almost savagely. "Why don't you go to work, then?"

"I'm ready to work if you want to hire me," returned Mugsie, shifting uneasily.

The man took his cigar from his mouth and spit disgustingly and then demanded shortly:

"What can you do?"

"Anything you say, boss," suggested Mugsie confidentially. "Saw wood, tend the babies, or bust a bank. But I've got to eat first, you know."

The man hesitated as if uncertain, for an instant, and then he replied gruffly.

"Well, all right! I'll stand for your dinner anyway, and then we can talk. I think I can use you. Come on!" and, as he spoke, he turned and entered the hotel office with Mugsie following closely upon his heels. After a few brief words with the clerk in charge, Mugsie was at length escorted in state to a seat at a well-spread table in the solitary seclusiveness of the kitchen, where, in speechless silence, he managed to absorb sufficient food to constitute a substantial meal, and, as he was at last reluctantly forced to finish his feast, he shoved his chair slowly back and with a sigh of satisfaction strolled leisurely out to where his prospective employer was waiting for him in a secluded corner of the hotel office.

"I'm ready for biz," announced Mugsie as he stood picking his teeth laboriously. "What's the orders?"

"All right, then," returned the man abruptly. "You have got to hustle. That feed of yours will cost me half a dollar."

"It's worth it!" assured Mugsie confidently. "It sure was."

"Well," began the man briskly. "You see I represent the Chinese Conqueror—"

"What's that?" interrupted Mugsie wonderingly. "a side show or a—"

"It's neither!" declared his employer, scowling sternly at him. "It's the only original, genuine, non-alcoholic stomach stimulant on the market. There are others," he admitted, "but they are all frauds, fakes and imitations. It's the only complete cure for dyspepsia, indigestion, and all other troubles arising from an inactive stomach. It—"

"I don't think I need any today," exclaimed Mugsie in rising alarm. "You see, I—"

"I am simply introducing this reliable remedy to the public," explained the man. "I have here a bag of about two hundred small sample bottles which I want you to take—"

"I guess nit!" blurted Mugsie, vehemently. "I hain't sick. My stummick is all right now."

"——and deliver here in this town from house to house," continued the representative hurriedly. "Be sure and leave one at every single house and two at every double house. Understand?" and he picked up a canvas bag and slipped the strap over Mugsie's left shoulder and shoved him toward the door, saying as he did so:

"I've got to catch this train to the next town, but I'll be back in the morning to see how you are getting along, and leave you a new lot. Now get out and hustle for your bed and board," and he forced Mugsie down the steps, and on to the sidewalk.

Mugsie was speechless. Somehow he could not seem to find words suitable to express the true state of his injured and outraged feelings as he turned and trudged slowly down the village street. The serene, placid smile of self-satisfaction had vanished from his face, and there was now a nervous, shifty look in his bleary eyes, which changed to relief as he watched his late employer hurrying across the street in the direction of the dépôt.

For nearly five minutes Mugsie was true to the trust imposed upon him, but the day was sultry, he was well fed, and felt more like sleeping than trudging about in the hot sun from house to house with a bag of bottles on his back, but he stuck manfully to it until he heard the noon train arrive and depart. Then he straightened suddenly up, shouldered his samples, and struck out straight down through the village street without stopping until he reached the outskirts of the town and there, safely secluded under a bridge over a broad, babbling brook, he tossed aside his burden of bottles and sat wearily down in the cool shade. Leaning comfortably back against the stone buttress of the bridge, he closed his eyes and promptly proceeded to sleep.

Mugsie slept and snored serenely as only a healthy and lazy man can sleep and snore on a sultry day after a hearty meal, and he was soon insensible alike to the rumble of passing wheels over the bridge above or the buzz and bite of a myriad of flies. He simply slept — dead to the world — until late in the afternoon he awoke with a sudden start and sat bolt upright, and for a moment sat staring straight ahead at nothing — in evident study.

"It's a great scheme, Mugsie! There's millions in it," he soliloquized in self-communion, and he yawned sleepily and reached for his samples.

"The Chinese Conqueror!" he mused, as he picked up a bottle and slowly and laboriously spelled out the letters of the label and the directions for doses below. Then, with his knife he carefully cut off and detached all reading matter from every bottle but the words "Chinese Conqueror" and then, one by one, he took the bottles and, cautiously withdrawing the corks, poured their contents out upon the grass. Refilling them with water from the brook, he corked them all securely, and at last, just as it was beginning to grow dark under the bridge, Mugsie had two hundred small samples of brook water before him, each bearing the lithographed label, "Chinese Conqueror" in large and conspicuous black letters.

Carefully concealing the bottles in the bag behind a big boulder under the bridge, Mugsie stole out from his shelter and clambered up into the road and struck out straight for town, and there he entered the first grocery store he saw and called for a cake of soap.

"What kind?" asked the clerk, staring in evident surprise at Mugsie's evident need of some detergent.

"Oh," replied Mugsie carelessly, "Just give me a cake o' white soap — the kind what floats."

In another moment his order was filled, and Mugsie held his precious purchase, carefully wrapped and tied, in one hand, while with the other he dove deep down into the pockets of his trousers and at last fished up a solitary nickel. Tossing it on to the counter, he hurried out of the store into the street, and down along the road through the gathering darkness, and crawled back under the shelter of the bridge again.

For a few moments Mugsie was busy with his cake of white floating soap, and then, carefully wiping his face and hands upon the sleeves of his tattered coat, he shouldered his bottles of brook water and climbed carefully back up into the road again, and with free and easy strides once more approached and entered the little town and took his station on a busy corner just as the street lamp overhead first began to flare and flicker.

Mugsie possessed a ready tongue and a copious command of picturesque English, which, together with his grotesque appearance, natural wit and drolleries, soon attracted a few passing pedestrians, and then, as his wits worked and his tongue flew, the crowd gradually grew until it seemed as if Mugsie had succeeded in attracting the attention of a major part of the male population of Coaltown.

"Gentlemen and fellow workers," he exclaimed, as the crowd gathered. "This is a dirty town! You are all dirty! The coal dust of the mines of Coaltown is on you all, and has sadly soiled your clothes. Cleanliness is next to Godliness, and I have come to deliver you from dirt. I have here," he announced loudly, as he held high a bottle of brook water, "a Chinese secret. You all know how white a Chinese laundryman will make a dirty shirt, don't you? How do they do it? You don't know! That's their secret! I'll tell you! I know! For fourteen years I was a missionary among the Chinks, and there I learned their most sacred secret. They all use this — what I am offering you here tonight at only twenty-five cents a bottle — half price — merely to introduce — 'The Chinese Conqueror!'" and he held higher

several bottles of brook water, limpid, pure and sparkling in the lamplight.

The crowd simply looked and laughed good-naturedly, but none ventured to bite at the bait he offered, and Mugsie continued to extol the virtues of his wares wondrously.

"It's great, gents! A simple, scientific, Chinese secret. It removes all dirt and grease instantly in hot, cold, hard or soft water. No matter how black the dirt — no matter how white the shirt — it's all the same. Behold!" Look and learn!" and as he spoke, Mugsie put the bottle back in the bag and drew something forth. Those nearest in the crowd craned their necks and saw something that looked like the short stub of a candle. He struck a match and slowly proceeded to light the wick, continuing loudly:

"I have here, as you all see, a sooty, greasy candle, such as you all use every day, and here is a friend here who wears a white shirt. With his kind permission, I will now proceed to show you all just what the Chinese Conqueror will do to dirt."

Before anyone could even realize what his intentions were, Mugsie blew out the candle and, stepping quickly up, suddenly drew the greasy, sooty, charred end straight across the broad back of a burly bystander who stood gazing in his shirt sleeves, leaving a straight streak of grease and soot from shoulder to shoulder.

For a moment it looked as if Mugsie must either fight or fly, but again his smooth speech and easy assurance asserted themselves, and with slow and deliberate movements he coolly drew forth a bottle from the bag at his side and carefully applied its contents to the soiled and streaked shirt. Like magic, even under the manipulation of Mugsie's grimy fingers, the broad smooch vanished, leaving the cloth spotless and unsoiled, and then Mugsie straightened slowly up and cast a look of conscious triumph over the heads of the bystanders.

The crowd stood for a moment gazing wonderingly, and then one man stepped slowly forward and bought a bottle, and then another and another, until in a few minutes Mugsie was working with both hands and a fast flying tongue as he passed out the bottles and took in the cash of Coaltown, until at length, as the last bottle was gone and the crowd was calling loudly for more,